

Book reviews

An unquiet life. Memoirs of a physician and cardiologist. By J F Pantridge. (pp 122, illus. £9.95). Antrim: Greystone Books, 1989.

This book is of unusual interest. It is not a history of cardiology in Belfast in the last forty years, though that is touched on in some of its aspects. It is the self-revelation of the remarkable man and physician who revolutionised the practice of cardiology in Belfast, in Ulster, and ultimately the world. He may not have meant it, but its chief interest is to trace the development of the boy from Hillsborough, through school and student days, through the dreadful sufferings of Japanese prisoner-of-war camps, through early post-graduate years, to being physician in charge of a ward unit in the Royal Victoria Hospital and the creator of a modern cardiological service. If that personality sometimes seems, and indeed was, assertive and combative, combativeness was essential if cardiology in Belfast was to be forced or dragged into the modern age, and into a new effectiveness. What the book does little to reveal is the fact that Frank Pantridge has a heart of gold. His cardiology was not merely electromechanical but humane. Many honours have come his way, the most distinguished being the immediate award, in the field, of the Military Cross, for gallantry in the face of the enemy. He has the esteem of thousands of patients, and of his colleagues. There is no doubt but that those profiting, and those generations still to profit, from Frank's work, will rise up to call him blessed. This will be a change for Frank, because great reforms cannot be effected without opposition, and, such is human nature, resentment.

The style is admirable and so is the book production. The binding is secure. There is no index. There is only one mis-spelling. Everyone should buy this book. The proceeds go to the Heart Fund.

JS LOGAN

Myotonic dystrophy. (Second edition). By Peter S Harper, MA, DM, FRCP. (pp 384, illus. £40.00). London: W B Saunders, 1989.

Why should a monograph on a muscle disease, written by a geneticist, be important to anaesthetists, cardiologists, diabetologists, gastroenterologists, obstetricians, ophthalmologists, orthopaedic surgeons, paediatricians and speech therapists? Because it is to them, rather than to neurologists, that most patients with myotonic dystrophy will present, and unfortunately these patients often pass through the hands of many doctors before the correct diagnosis is realised. Encounters between patients with myotonic dystrophy and the medical profession are seldom straightforward but matters are considerably simplified if the diagnosis is known.

Professor Harper makes the point that this is a disease for real clinicians (of whatever specialty) and that, in the absence of a specific test, followers of the 'serum rhubarb' approach will seldom get far. The diagnostic challenge is heightened by immense phenotypic heterogeneity; the example perpetuated in most textbooks of medicine of the myotonic dystrophy patient as a bald man with a wasted face and small testicles accounts for well under 10% of gene carriers. Professor Harper has studied this disease in a depth equalled by few. From early descriptions of the disease, through to the fine detail of chromosome 19, aspects of myotonic dystrophy are dealt with in a comprehensive yet straightforward manner. Where there is doubt or controversy, he presents both sides of the argument and states his own view. It is difficult to cavil with anything in this book. It is *the* book on myotonic dystrophy and it should be available on the library shelves of any department whose members are likely to encounter these unfortunate patients.

VH PATTERSON

Human growth after birth. (Fifth edition). By David Sinclair, MA, MD, DSc, FRCSE. (pp 259, illus. £12.50, paper covers). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

This book is primarily intended for students of pre-clinical medicine and para-medical disciplines, taking courses in human biology. It gives a comprehensive overview of growth, differentiation and maturation of cells and systems from the fertilization of the ovum until old age, and would hold interest for general readership. Since the first edition in 1969, there has been much work on the fundamental cellular biology of growth, biosynthetic growth hormone has been synthesised, and anti-oncogenes discovered. References to these have been included, but kept to an elementary account. Medical students and doctors working in paediatrics or with teenage patients would find the second chapter, on growth in height and weight, of particular value. Reference to age at the onset of puberty and the